

LAVENDER POND NATURE PARK



LAVENDER POND NATURE PARK
LAVENDER ROAD
ROTHERHITHE STREET
LONDON S.E.16
TEL. (01) 232 0498

INTRODUCTION

LAVENDER POND is managed as a nature reserve, educational facility and place of recreation by the Trust for Urban Ecology, with grant-aid from the London Borough of Southwark.

The Trust pioneered the concept of urban nature parks, opening the William Curtis Ecological Park in 1977, and now runs three demonstration sites in South London. Our basic aims are to:

Promote the development of knowledge and expertise in the fields of Urban Ecology, habitat creation and site management.

Provide information, advice and expertise on the design and management of urban greenspaces.

Carry out applied research in urban ecology.

Encourage the use of urban greenspace for education.

For more information about the Trust, its other sites, services and publications please write to: The Director, Trust for Urban Ecology, PO Box 514, London SE16 1AS. (An SAE would be appreciated.)

The Trust for Urban Ecology is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. We receive financial support from various sources including UK2000, Nature Conservancy Council, London Docklands Development Corporation, London Borough of Southwark, the Charities Aid Foundation, and the Ernest Cook Trust.

We would also like to thank Lloyds Bank, the Linnean Society, BTCV, Community Industry, London Wildlife Trust, British Gas and the many other individuals, companies and organisations who assist us.

The Trust is affiliated to the Royal Society for Nature Conservation and the Fairbrother Group.

Reg. Charity No. 278601

Company Reg. No. 1446653

SITE HISTORY

Lavender Pond Nature Park was created in 1981 by the London Borough of Southwark in conjunction with TRUE and Landuse Consultants Ltd. with the aim of providing a haven for wildlife, an amenity for local residents and an educational resource.

The Park is set in the northern part of the former Surrey Commercial Docks, once the centre of Britain's timber trade. It was created on the site of the former Lavender Pond, a large expanse of shallow water where timber was floated to prevent it from drying and cracking. Close by were large sheds for storing more timber, while along the nearby Thames foreshore was an oil refinery, fire station and lead works. The original entrance lock into the timber pond allowed small boats and lighters to enter and leave under a lifting bridge on Rotherhithe Street. This entrance was blocked in 1928 when the Port of London Authority built the Pumphouse. This large and impressive building, which housed the pumps that maintained water levels throughout Surrey Docks, still dominates the scene today, one of very few buildings left from the heyday of the docks.

The present Lavender Pond recalls the type of wetland

habitats that once extended for many miles along both banks of the Thames. Indeed, for thousands of years there were no actual banks in this area as much of the land north of New Cross, Camberwell and Brixton is below the levels reached by the highest tides, making the whole area subject to frequent flooding.

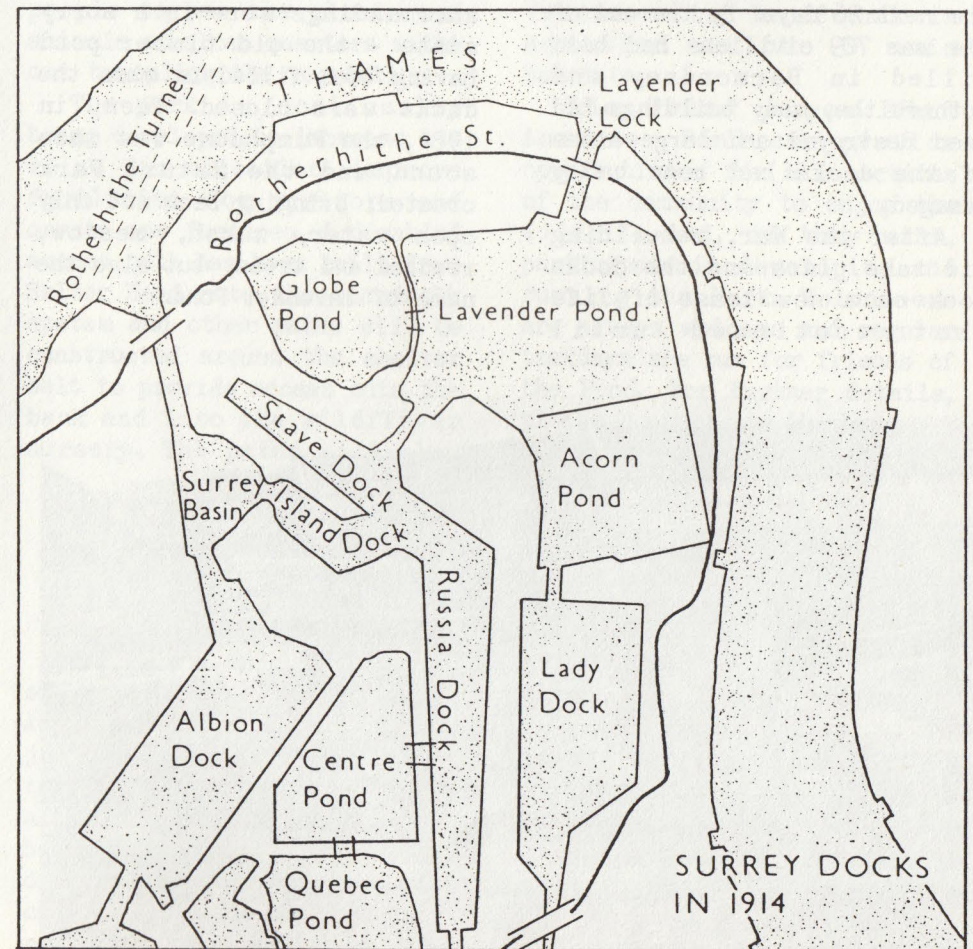
The Romans were the first to try and exclude the tides. Rotherhithe Street and the aptly named Bermondsey Wall follow the line of this early southern embankment. When the Romans left the banks fell into disrepair and were constantly breached, recreating large expanses of marshland. King Canute is said to have put this to good effect. Attacking London in 1016, he was able to drag his fleet through the marshes between Rotherhithe and Vauxhall, thereby avoiding defences mounted around London Bridge.

Over the following centuries the level of the land was raised, partly through the dumping of rubbish, and the banks properly secured, creating a deep river channel in which even large vessels could reach London. Trade developed rapidly in the 16th and 17th centuries and before long wharves and warehouses formed a continuous band on

both sides of the river. So many ships came that the loop of the river round the Isle of Dogs could be traced by a forest of masts, while the short river journey from Dartford to the Pool of London could take several days. Eventually, the riverside wharves and warehouses could no longer cope and that, plus the danger and delays caused by

periodic gales, led to the creation of the enclosed docks.

Surrey Commercial Docks took shape over many years, starting in with the Howland Wet Dock (now Greenland Dock) in 1703. In addition to the main docks: Russia (1810), Norway (1811), Canada (1876) and Greenland (enlarged 1890s) there were the shallow timber ponds: Acorn (1811), Lavender (1815) and



Quebec (1926). By the 1920s, timber constituted about 20% by weight of all imports into Britain. An annual quantity of over 400,000 tons, much of which passed through Surrey Docks.

The Docks played a major role in World War II, becoming a prime target for bombers. One air raid on 7th September 1940 killed 430 people in East London and raids continued for the next 26 days. By the end of the war 709 civilians had been killed in Bermondsey and Rotherhithe, many buildings had been destroyed and large areas of the docks had been badly damaged.

After the War, rebuilding did take place and the docks took on a new lease of life that continued until

containerization was introduced in the mid-1960s. Then the rise of Tilbury and the East Coast ports combined with increased mechanization to greatly reduce the demand for traditional dock labour in the up-river docks. Surrey Docks finally closed in 1970, its 350 acres became derelict and 270 years of tradition came to an end.

After 10 years of neglect the Pumphouse and its surroundings were in a sorry state - the old timber pond having been filled-in when the docks were closed. Then, in 1981, the Pumphouse was made sound and the Nature Park created; bringing back not only open water, marsh, meadow, reedbed and trees, but also the name of Lavender Pond.



THE PARK

Despite covering only 2.5 acres, the Park features a variety of habitats each with characteristic communities of plants and animals. Some areas are left as undisturbed as possible, while others are heavily used by schoolchildren and other visitors. A system of wooden boardwalks enables people to see the plants and animals at close quarters without trampling the vegetation.

The park is continually being developed to increase its value for education, improve facilities for visitors and create new features. A disabled access path has been built from Salter Road onto the boardwalk system and other paths will be constructed around the shelter belt to provide access onto the bank and into the wildflower nursery. The paths will also

connect with the Pumphouse, greatly improving facilities for people in wheelchairs, parents with pushchairs and anyone who has difficulty in walking over rough ground. Nurseries for marsh and aquatic plants, a willow coppice, rockery and specialised 'micro-habitats' are among the features to be found in addition to the 5 main habitats.

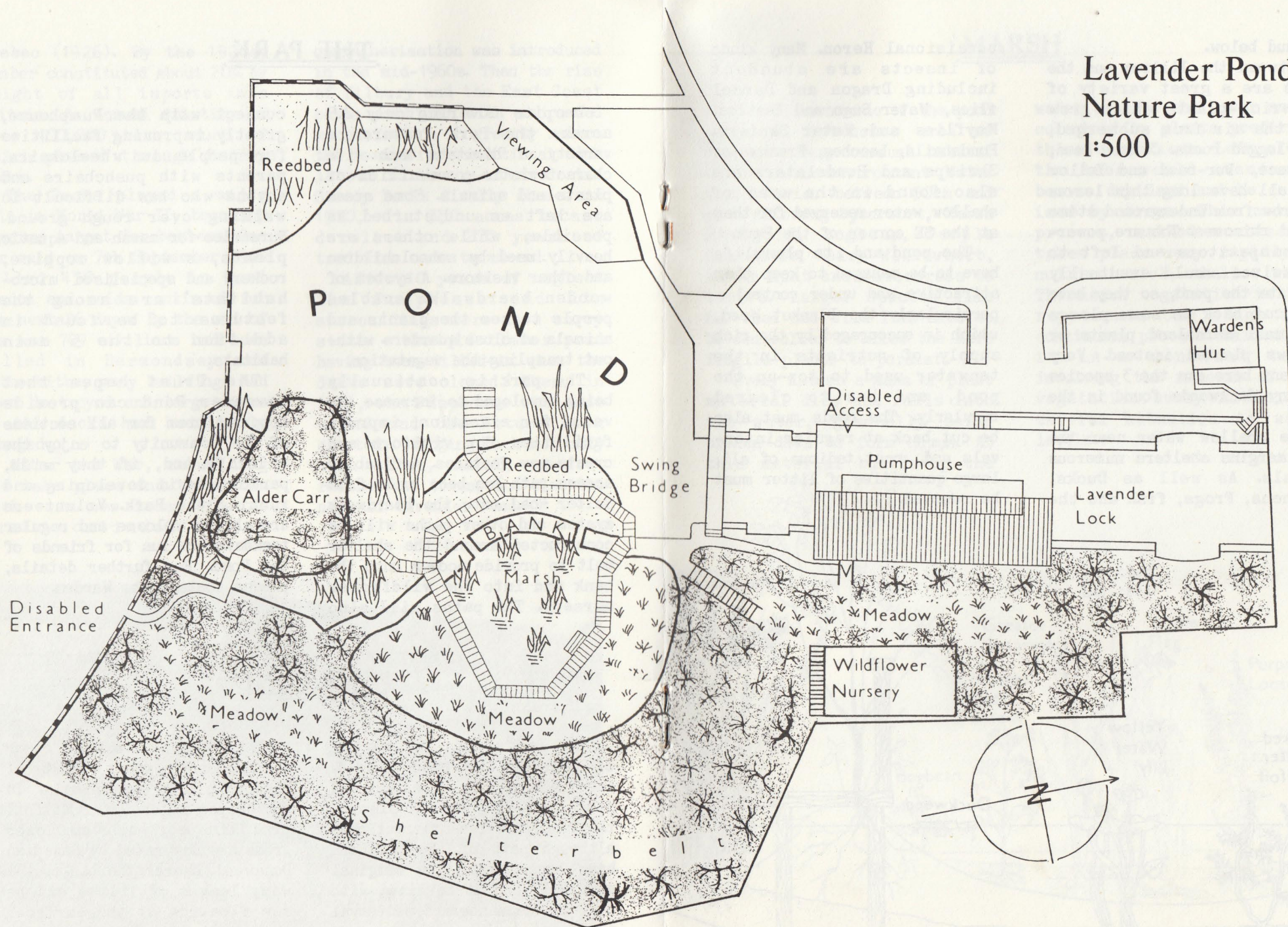
The Trust hopes that Lavender Pond can provide opportunities for all sections of the community to enjoy the wildlife and, if they wish, participate in developing and running the Park. Volunteers are always welcome and regular taskdays are run for friends of the Pond. For further details, please contact the Warden.

THE POND

The Park's main feature is, of course, the pond itself. About 40m by 50m in extent and just over 2m deep in places, the Pond is a recent creation - although part of the northern bank consists of the original dock wall and it is lined with clay in the manner of mediaeval ponds and early canals.

The water is fresh and clear and supports a great variety of aquatic plants and animals. In the deeper water Water Milfoil predominates, while shallower areas are dominated by Canadian Pondweed. Nearer the banks, the waxy leaves of lilies can be seen floating at the surface, their roots firmly embedded in

Lavender Pond Nature Park 1:500



the mud below.

Between the lillies and the banks are a great variety of flowering plants which grow into the air from submerged, waterlogged roots. Common Reed, Reedmace, Bur-reed and Yellow Flag all have long thin leaves and grow from underground stems called rhizomes. The are powerful competitors and left to themselves would eventually dominate the pond, so they have been cut back in some places and small marshland plants or willows planted instead. Very abundant here are the 3 species of tiny duckweeds found in the pond.

The shallow water near the pond margins shelters numerous animals. As well as Ducks, Moorhens, Frogs, fish and the

occasional Heron. Many kinds of insects are abundant including Dragon and Damsel flies, Water Bugs and Beetles, Mayflies and Water Skaters. Pondsnaills, Leeches, Freshwater Shrimps and Pondslaters are also found in the area of shallow water reserved for them at the SE corner of the Park.

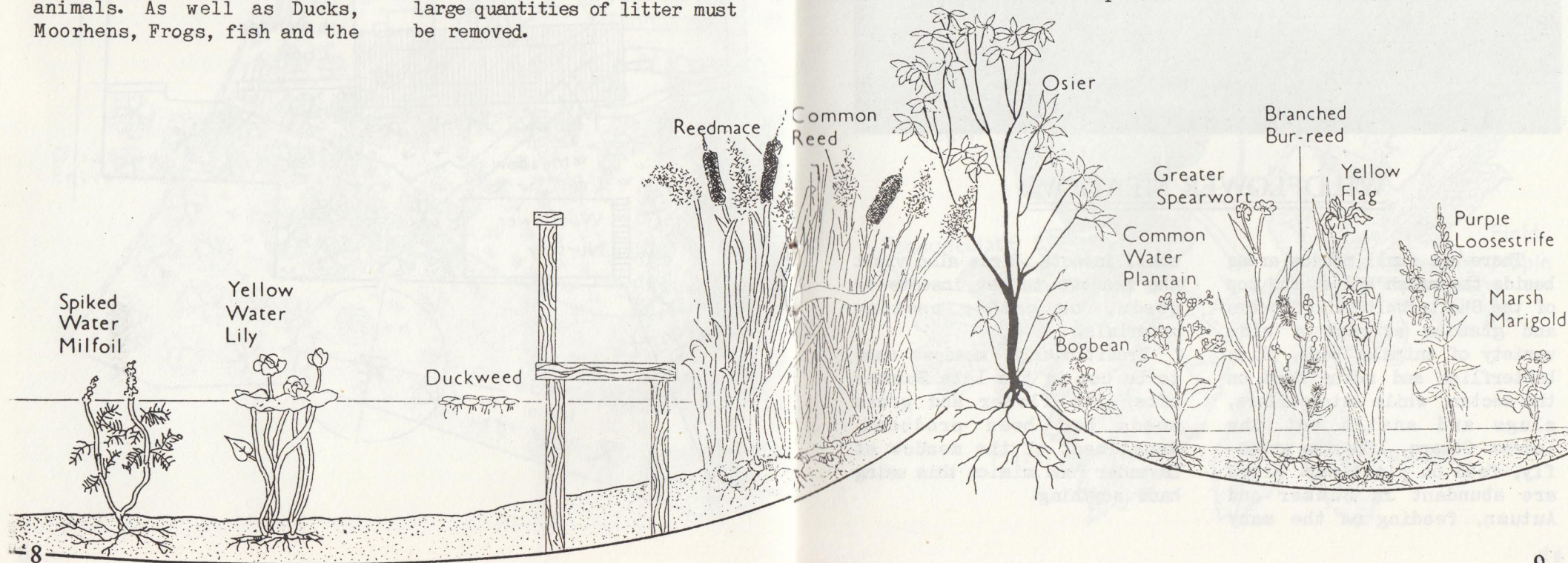
The pond and its plantlife have to be managed to keep them attractive and under control - particularly the Blanket Weed, which is encouraged by the rich supply of nutrients in the tapwater used to top-up the pond, and has to be cleared regularly. The reeds must also be cut back at regular intervals and, most tedious of all, large quantities of litter must be removed.

MARSH

The eastern side of the pond forms an extensive area of marsh, a very unusual habitat in the urban environment. Water depth varies between 50cm and zero allowing Spearwort, Marsh Marigold, Bogbean, Purple Loosestrife, Hairy Willowherb, Water Mint and Watercress to thrive. Larger species like Bur-reed and Wild Iris have to be controlled to allow the more fragile plants to persist.

Every Autumn a mass of plant material dies and falls into the water, gradually being broken down to form humus. As this material builds-up the

water becomes shallower and is colonised by plants preferring these conditions. Left alone, the area would eventually become dry land and be colonised by trees. This natural process, called succession, takes place very rapidly in nutrient-rich, shallow water. The marsh vegetation in fact represents one stage in a continuous process. Maintaining it is a constant task, involving the removal of dead vegetation every Autumn and careful attention to water levels.



EDUCATION

Lavender Pond provides a well-established educational programme for school pupils of all ages. The design of the park lends itself to the safe, first-hand study of Natural History by even the smallest children, while sufficient variety exists to satisfy the keenest advanced student.

In addition to studying the park's wildlife, teaching activities extend beyond the park and include exploring the area's history, buildings and natural history. Beachcombing on the Thames' foreshore is a popular activity, leading pupils to take a great interest in the past and its interpretation through art, drama and writing. The Rotherhithe Heritage Museum is an added source of inspiration and its curator, Ron Goode, works

closely with staff at Lavender Pond. Another nearby, but very different, attraction is Surrey Docks Farm and many school groups combine work at the Pond with a visit to the Farm.

On a less formal level, a Nature Club Playscheme is organized for local youngsters in the school holidays. 'Holiday Fun - Naturally!' is the slogan and interested parents should contact the staff for more information.

Lavender Pond's educational activities are summarised below and will be greatly enhanced by the development of the Pumphouse as an Environmental Studies Centre (Opening Autumn '89). Staff welcome enquiries from anyone wanting further information or assistance with any aspect of the teaching of Environmental Studies.

<p>Primary Fieldwork Pondlife, Minibeasts, Woods & trees, Beachcombing Preliminary & follow-up visits as required</p>	<p>In Service Courses In conjunction with South London Science Centre</p>	<p>Secondary Biology Freshwater Studies Lower school, G.C.S.E., A-level. Slideshows, team teaching, other follow-up as required</p>
<p>Advice And practice assistance with Environmental Studies designing and stocking school ponds, school nature areas</p>	<p>Materials and Resources If we cannot provide what is required, we will put teachers in touch with suitable sources</p>	

